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THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL FACTORS AND PERCEIVED WORK EXPERIENCE--ETC(U)
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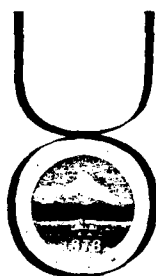
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November 1979

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<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Turnover</td> <td>Education</td> <td>Organizational dependability</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Absenteeism</td> <td>Group Attitudes</td> <td>Personal importance</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tenure</td> <td>Met expectations</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Age</td> <td>Job challenge</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			Turnover	Education	Organizational dependability	Absenteeism	Group Attitudes	Personal importance	Tenure	Met expectations		Age	Job challenge	
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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)														
This paper examined the relative influence of personal factors and perceived work experiences on employee turnover and absenteeism among a sample of 200 clerical and service workers in a major hospital. It was found that turnover and absenteeism represent largely independent behaviors. Moreover, although personal factors predicted absenteeism better than perceived work experiences, no clear predictive trends were found for turnover. Results are discussed as they relate to theory and previous research.														

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The Influence of Personal Factors and Perceived Work
Experiences on Employee Turnover and Absenteeism¹

A review of the literature on employee turnover and absenteeism indicates fairly clearly that most studies on the topic utilize bivariate rather than multivariate analyses, and examine only one form of withdrawal behavior (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Muchinsky, 1977). As a result, little is known about the relative influence of major sets of antecedents on turnover and absenteeism. It is the intent of this study to examine the relative influence of two major sets of antecedents on both forms of withdrawal behavior. These two sets are personal factors and the work experiences of employees. In the literature, considerable emphasis tends to be placed on identifying work-related influences (including work experiences) on withdrawal processes with little consideration of whether or not such influences do, in fact, represent a major influence on turnover and absenteeism (Mowday, Porter, & Stone, 1979). Hence, it is useful to compare the predictive powers of such variables to the influence of personal characteristics of the employees themselves.

The selection of these two sets of variables is partly in response to an hypothesis suggested by Nicholson, Brown, and Chadwick-Jones (1976) that work experiences do not have a substantial influence on withdrawal behavior. Based on their study, Nicholson et al. commented that "the common view of absence as a pain reductive response on the part of the worker to his work experience is naive, narrow and empirically unsupportable" (1976, p. 735). At present, there is little information available regarding which set of influences, personal factors or work experiences, is relatively more important. It seems logical, therefore, to explore this issue further by examining both sets of antecedents simultaneously.

Personal characteristics examined in this paper include: age, tenure in the organization, tenure in position, sex, and education. These variables were selected for study because of their purported importance in employee withdrawal behavior (Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1977; Nicholson & Goodge, 1976). Five work experience perceptions were examined in the present study (after Buchanan, 1974). These are: (1) group attitudes toward the organization, i.e., the extent to which one's peers had positive or negative attitudes toward their employer; (2) met expectations, i.e., the extent to which one's expectations concerning organizational life have been met on the job; (3) job challenge, i.e., the ability of the organization to provide challenging and stimulating work assignments, (4) personal importance to the organization, i.e., personal feelings that the employee is making real contributions to the organization; and (5) organizational dependability, i.e., a stable flow of expected inducements from the organization to employees. All of these work experiences represent perceptions of having undergone a particular class of experience in the work environment (see Buchanan for detailed discussion).

The work experiences chosen for analysis represent the most important indicators of organizational commitment in Buchanan's (1974) study. Since current evidence indicates that organizational commitment is predictive of withdrawal from the organization (Steers, 1977), each of the above work experiences were good candidates for inclusion into this analysis of withdrawal behavior. Relationships between these work experiences, as measured by Buchanan's instrument, and turnover and absenteeism have not been previously examined.

METHOD

Sample and Research Site

This study was carried out among a sample of 200 clerical and service workers of a major midwestern hospital. Average age of the subjects was about

37, while the average tenure was about seven years. Educational backgrounds were primarily high school degrees.

Research Instruments

Personal characteristics -- Subjects supplied information on questionnaires concerning their tenure in the organization, tenure in position, sex, age, and educational attainment.

Work Experiences -- The five work experience variables which characterize the job situation were measured using the instrument developed by Buchanan (1974). Each scale (described above) is represented by several items measured on seven-point Likert scales. Internal consistencies of the five scales ranged from .64 to .80, using coefficient alpha.

Turnover and absenteeism -- Turnover data were collected for one year after questionnaire administration. During this period 17% of the sample turned over. Absenteeism was measured as the number of days absent from work over a nine-month period.

Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered on-site by university researchers during regular working hours. Subjects were informed that participation was voluntary and were assured confidentiality of responses. Of the initial random sample, questionnaire data were collected from 87%. Thus, the resulting sample size upon which the analyses were based was 200. Absenteeism data were available for only 124 subjects in the sample.

RESULTS

Initially, concern focused on examining the extent to which various sets of variables were interrelated. Pearson product-moment correlations between study variables revealed a median $r = .12$ between the various personal factors,

a median \underline{r} = .57 between the various work experiences, and a median \underline{r} = .16 between personal factors and work experiences. Due to the high intercorrelation among the work experiences, partial correlations were used for purposes of analysis, as described below. Finally, turnover and absenteeism were found to be unrelated (\underline{r} = .06).

Multivariate Analysis

First, correlating sets of both personal characteristics and work experiences with withdrawal behavior yielded multiple R s = .33 and .42, respectively, for turnover and absenteeism, indicating that these factors when taken together do indeed significantly influence withdrawal behavior. These results compare favorably with earlier findings (e.g., Garrison & Muchinsky, 1977) even though the magnitude is not particularly strong, suggesting the existence of other factors (e.g., reward systems) that also influence withdrawal. Results are shown in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here
- - - - -

Second, when multiple correlations were run separately for personal characteristics and work experiences and subsequent turnover and absenteeism it was found that antecedents of absenteeism were different than those for turnover. Personal characteristics were significantly associated with absenteeism (R = .35, p < .05), but not turnover (R = .20, N.S.). On the other hand work experiences were significantly associated with turnover (R = .29, p < .05) but not absenteeism (R = .30, N.S.). The magnitude of prediction for work experiences and both forms of withdrawal, however, was the same. Williams tests (Williams, 1959) show that one particular equation was not significantly more predictive than another prediction equation for each dependent variable.

The contribution of each set of influences to explained variance above

and beyond that of the other set was obtained by decomposing the multivariate relationships provided in Table 1 (using the procedure of Cohen & Cohen, 1975). With regard to the prediction of absenteeism, R is increased by .12 with the addition of personal characteristics to work experiences (a significant increase, $p < .05$); the addition of work experiences to personal characteristics results in an increase of only .07 (not significant). With regard to the prediction of turnover, R is increased by .13 with the addition of work experiences to personal characteristics; the addition of personal characteristics to work experiences results in an increase of only .04. Both increases are not statistically significant.

Bivariate Analysis

In order to provide further information regarding which factors most closely relate to turnover and absenteeism and to replicate the simple bivariate analyses one typically finds in the literature for comparative purposes, bivariate correlations were computed for each personal characteristic and work experience separately with each measure of withdrawal behavior. Results are shown in Table 1.

Simple Pearson product-moment correlations for each of the sets of measures show little consistent relationship between personal characteristics and turnover and absenteeism. On the other hand, there is a consistent relationship between each of the work experiences and both forms of withdrawal. In order to correct for common methods variance, fourth order partial correlation coefficients were computed for work experiences partialling out the effects of all other work experiences. These same procedures were used for personal characteristics. Results in Table 1 show that the number of significant work experience predictors decreased dramatically and the number of significant personal characteristic predictors increased, especially for absenteeism.

After partial correlation, only one personal characteristic, that of sex, was significantly related to both turnover and absenteeism. Males had higher turnover rates than females. In addition, both forms of tenure and age were all related to absenteeism, but not turnover. Such findings are consistent with Nicholson et al. (1977). No other personal characteristics were related to turnover.

With regard to the relationships of individual work experiences with turnover and absenteeism, only the partial correlation between experienced organizational dependability and turnover was significant, while only the partial correlation between experienced job challenge and absenteeism was significant. These findings would be expected from theory (Buchanan, 1974; Steers & Rhodes, 1978).

DISCUSSION

The focus of this study has been exploratory in nature. The relationship between two major sets of determinants of withdrawal behavior, personal characteristics and work related experiences, have been examined as they relate to turnover and absenteeism. With respect to the findings of this study, several interesting conclusions emerged. First, it was found that turnover and absenteeism were relatively independent. This supports Porter and Steers (1973) contention that turnover and absenteeism are distinct behaviors in need of separate attention.

Second, it was determined that absenteeism was better predicted by personal factors than work experiences, while no clear trend emerged for turnover in terms of relative predictive power. Thus, for this particular sample of hospital employees, turnover behavior is distinguished from absenteeism in terms of the antecedents of each behavior, especially with respect to personal characteristic antecedents. With respect to work experiences, perceived organizational dependability was significantly related to turnover but not absenteeism. Conversely,

job challenge was significantly related to absenteeism but not turnover.

Of particular note is the inverse relationships between age and absenteeism and tenure and absenteeism. Such a pattern would not normally be expected. This leads us to agree with the recent conclusion of Muchinsky (1977) that there is a great amount of inconsistency in this research. Muchinsky postulates that the reason for such disparate results in the absenteeism literature is probably due to the myriad of different ways absenteeism is measured. However, when one closely examines the review of the literature by Rhodes and Steers (1978), which includes information on the types of absenteeism measures used, one finds that results are still inconsistent within different measures of absenteeism. Perhaps inconsistent results are not only due to the type of absenteeism measure used but also a function of type of sample used and/or level of aggregation used. Or, perhaps inconsistent relationships are due to the fact that underlying causal variables of absenteeism have not yet been identified. These same notions may apply to the study of turnover as well.

Overall, the results of this study support the contention of Nicholson et al. (1977) and Nicholson and Goodge (1976) that personal characteristics are superior predictors of absence behavior when compared to work experiences. It also supports Nicholson et al.'s (1976) contention that absence behavior is probably not a pain reductive response on the part of the worker to work experience. The results of the study further suggest that turnover may be the more likely candidate for being the pain reductive response on the part of the worker to his or her work experience, although this is speculative based on available data.

In summary, personal characteristics exhibited a higher correlation with absenteeism than turnover, while work experiences had correlations of similar magnitude with absenteeism and turnover. These results point to the importance of using multivariate and comparative analyses in the study of withdrawal

behavior. In particular, the results using partial correlations cautions against the proliferation of simple bivariate correlations. Moreover, the differential results for turnover and absenteeism emphasizes the need for more comparative studies. Further efforts in these directions should add measurably to our existing level of knowledge of withdrawal processes in organizations and will hopefully contribute useful information to managers interested in controlling both types of behavior.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The research reported here was supported by funds provided under ONR Contract N00014-76-C-0164, NR 170-812. The comments of Richard T. Mowday on an earlier draft are greatly appreciated. Requests for reprints should be sent to Daniel G. Spencer, School of Business, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045.

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TABLE 1

Simple and Partial Correlations Between Personal Characteristics
and Work Experiences and Turnover and Absenteeism

	<u>Turnover</u>		<u>Absenteeism</u>	
	Simple <u>r</u>	Partial <u>r</u>	Simple <u>r</u>	Partial <u>r</u>
<u>Personal Characteristics</u>				
Tenure in Organization	-.10	-.08	.16**	.34**
Tenure in Position	-.06	.03	-.12	-.23**
Sex	-.14*	-.12*	.13	-.18*
Age	-.06	.02	-.17*	-.23**
Education	.13	.11	.07	-.01
R_{PC}	<u>.20</u>		<u>.35*</u>	
<u>Work Experiences</u>				
Group Attitudes	-.18**	-.04	-.16*	-.03
Met Expectations	-.18**	.01	-.15*	.04
Job Challenge	-.18**	-.07	-.23**	-.15*
Personal Importance	-.14*	.03	-.23**	-.13
Organizational Dependability	-.23**	-.12*	-.16*	.01
R_{WE}	<u>.29*</u>		<u>.30</u>	
$R_{PC + WE}$	<u>.33</u>		<u>.42*</u>	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

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LIST 16
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